

Among The Clouds

by Rainhealsme

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Summary: Inspired by How To Train Your Dragon and Eragon. Facing a tyrant armed with only a sword and hope that he could prevail was not the adventure Ash pictured. Yet when he discovers that his Charizard is the Dragon of Legend, they are to challenge the Dark King. Taken in by the Academy, where dragon riders are trained, he must rise up and prove to be the 'Rider of Legend'. [AshxHarem]

1. Chapter 1

****You know, I never thought that I would be writing anything associated with Ash/Satoshi of Pok  mon  guess I was wrong!**

"How to Train Your Dragon" was the main inspiration for this story, so a majority of the credit goes to Dream Works for this. However, that doesn't mean that I'm going to follow the movie's plot exactly. As a fanfiction writer, I feel the need to add my own flare to the plot. ****

****I hope you enjoy my little twist on How to Train Your Dragon! Oh, and before you all ask, Ash's father ****_**WILL**_**** make an appearance, and soon.****

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><p>Facing a tyrant armed with only a sword and hope that he could prevail was not the adventure Ash pictured. Yet when he discovers that his Charizard is the Dragon of Legend, they are to challenge Nexus, the Dark King. Taken in by the Academy, where dragon riders are trained, he must rise up and prove to be the 'Rider of Legend'.

_As Ash finds out, fighting for an almost hopeless cause when no one believes in you is not easy. With all odds stacked against them, Ash

and his dragon must fight for their own lives as well as try to fulfill all expectations and free the Lands from the evil tyrant's rule once and for all._

**Among The Clouds**

One boy. One dragon. One kingdom. One destiny.

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**Prologue:** The Orphan and the Queen._

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Valemnia was prosperousâ€"its people were joyous, and the wealth plentiful. However, not everyone shared in the happiness. There was one man, Nexus, who opposed everything Valemnia stood for and believed he should, in his opinion, fix it.

So he began. First, he started by destroying small villages, one by one. Then he became more ambitious and went higher in his destruction by destroying towns, major cities, and trade routes. One day, feeling immensely courageous, he imprisoned the king and the queen, and named himself the new ruler.

He became the self-proclaimed "Dark Lord Nexus" of Valemnia. Nexus banished all who opposed him, either openly or not, and began to 'fix' the country in his own image. He planned to make it so no one would be able to oppose him. The tyrant banished or imprisoned those with even a little strength and power. Those with large amounts of power were sentenced to death. The once great kingdom had crumbled into corruption and evil, and slowly, its inhabitants lost hope of ever returning to how they once livedâ€|

During these events, a prophecy was written: It goes that one day, someone with the power Nexus tried to suppress, will use it to overcome the evil in the region. Despite the promise of the prophecy, many people thought it to be false and continued to live in the horrible conditions under the dark ruler. However, those who believed the prophecy had something to look forward to.

Unfortunately, Nexus also believed the prophecy. He spent countless hours searching any family with a child under the age of two and scanning for power and never found any. This caused the prophecy to lose its credibility, and soon, all hope from Valemnia had vanishedâ€|

Satisfied with his work, Nexus continued to rule the land with an iron fist, completely unaware that the imprisoned queen had escaped to a land that was untouched by his tyranny and evil.

Our story begins here with the young queen and the little glimmer hope she carried in her armsâ€|

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A frigid breeze swept across the rough brick road as Queen Delila held a mightyena's skin rug around her neck, concealing a small bundle.

She peered ever so slightly to the side, weary of the approaching danger. A blizzard was coming, she thought, her intuition a constant reminder that she had no escape. She had reached the entrance of the wood boarded building, its welcoming walls frozen rigid with an inch thick layer of ice. She hated what she had to do. Her unwilling arms lay down the bundle in a small corner of the entrance area, and she made sure that it was well protected from the fierce wind.

Her hair hid the sorrowful eyes that mourned the moment that was to come. Hearing the tiniest rustle of a leaf, she froze, her spine stiff, ears scanning the immense depth of forest around her. Her eyes slowly slid back down towards the bundle that was her most precious child. She was about to impart from herself, forever.

Now's not the time for grieving, she thought. She waved her hand above the baby's face, forehead scrunched up in fervent concentration.

After a moment, she stopped and gently placed her puckered lips onto her little one's head, whispering a spell. As her faced hardened, she readied herself for the next key moments of her chances of survival; the bundle disappeared into the mist.

By Arceus, I hope he livesâ€| she plead holding back tears.

Her milky legs straightened, visible through warm black leggings. She was too young to die, too young to live in such a dangerous world. She unhooked her maple longbow, the varnish still unchanged from the first skirmish six whole years ago. She turned her body, and an instant later, the piercing howl of an enemy resonated through the air. Her eyes caught sight of three pairs of red eyes staring at her ferocious through the underbrush.

Instantly, the creatures took their position ready for her escape attempt. Delia's mind raced, scanning her memory for any knowledge that she may have to rescue her from their trap. Her left foot moved slowly to the side, as to not provoke the despicable creatures, but her killers matched her move, well trained to keep the best position for a clean kill. She could see the silky black and grey fur of the K9-like creatures, razor sharp teeth and claws that would soon end her life.

A small flicker of doubt leaked into her usually calm amber eyes, that maybe she would not make it and most likely die. _At least my little one will live on,_ she thought. Though, it did not give her as much comfort as she had hoped.

It was then, when the creatures detected a slight wavering in her concentration that they charged. The one directly in front, its jaw twitching, was the one who gave the signal and snarled, its muscles tensing and releasing, their energy propelling its powerful body forward. Behind it, another of the leapt over it, its fangs glinting in the moonlight, ready to pierce the flesh that many a man had longed for.

Delia's arrow was fired, the enchanted oak piercing straight through the roof of the leaping creature's mouth, collapsing the back part of his skull. Its blue magic released itself from around the arrow, finding the creature's life source, and smothering.

Delia's ear twitched as the creature whaled, knowing by instinct that there was two more coming at her from behind. She readied her hand in that millisecond, power flowing into her palm. The creatures were within a foot from her as she ducked gracefully, her knees bent down revealing her smooth thighs to the night sky. Her charged hand flew up, the other hand pressing her bow down to the ground and providing her balance. The jaws of the creatures snapped the air where each vital point of hers had been, their claws swiping with precision where her kneecaps, groin, and ankles were. Her charged hand waved with graceful timing onto the shoulder joint of the creature behind her, a faint black glow emanating from its flesh. A sickening crack reverberated from its bone.

She kept her concentration in those few seconds, dodging each claw as it tore a path of darkness through the air. But as she wove out, a claw shredded her upper thigh deeply, the evil magic disintegrating her flesh. Her right leg threatened to collapse, but the momentum that she had swung her out of harm's way. One of the creatures was crippled, but so was she. And there was four of them, and only one of her.

She quickly muttered another spell, a cyan mist forming a ghostly muscle where hers was torn. As the creatures turned on their heels, their muscles tensing, she pounced off, fleeing for her life.

She ran through the forest branches lacerating her face, while blood ran freely from her side. She could hear now, there were others coming. A new enemy from the branches had started firing iron darts from their tails at her while flying through the air. Her mind and magic sought out each deadly spike, although it was hard to bear. She dodged gracefully, her fit form paying off after years of service to her kingdom.

The creatures sprinted right behind her, seeming to gain on every pounce. Their snarls filled her eardrums, piercing her being with the fear of pure evil. She was tiring, her mental and magical strength diminished from the past few days of her journey. The ghostly muscle at her thigh flickered, sending her a stabbing shot of pain, causing her to grind her teeth together. Salty tears broke the barrier that she had set up and overwhelmed her, tears of utter desperation and need.

She turned her body backwards while running, a movement that she suffered painfully for, agony coursing through her veins. Drawing her bow, she formed a mist-like fire arrow to the string and released it. A high-pitched grunt of escaped her lips as she did so. She kept running as the arrow burst mid-flight, the last of her magical energy

turning into a solid wall of purple fire.

The creatures pounced through the barrier without hesitation, their own black shadows forming a protective ram surrounding their bodies, punching a hole to let them through. But the others had no chance. They were struck down by the barrier, its intense heat transforming the falling twigs from each tree into life seeking missiles, and with precision each of their corrupted hearts were pierced.

Delia gasped in horror as she sensed the creatures still pursuing her, knowing that she would probably die. Not many had ever defeated her magic of the highest degree with such ease. She knew she was desperately outmatched. Still, three creatures of the darkness, their glistening fur glinting in the moonlight, sprinted after her, each itching to take the kill.

After only a few minutes, her ghostly muscle faded out completely and her right leg gave out, her lithe body smashing to the ground. Blood seeped into the ground where her thigh was and she realized with horror that one of the claws had pierced her abdomen, its poison seeping into her body. Her whole body gushed with unbearable pain.

Arceus, please! I beg of thee! She pleads inwardly. However, she could feel a nauseating wave of intense agony about to flood her mind.

This is it! she thought as she shut her profoundly deep eyes. But through the incoming pain, a small glimpse of focus was apparent to her trained mind. The image of a gold and white creature was imprinted on the bloodstained canvas of her mind, his gentle eyes caressing her suffering soul.

A glowing aura emanated from him, as if he was from another realm. The aura seeped into her, giving her hope. Her focus flickered back to her surroundings. The creatures were now inches from her face, their putrid breath penetrating her once strong magical shield. Maniacal eyes hungered for her, savoring the moment of her helplessness. A claw tickled her neck, its sharp tip drawing a drop of crimson. She closed her eyes.

A strong voice startled her in her thoughts.

**Your work here is done, my child! I shall take over from here.**

The creatures staggered back slightly, feeling a power they had never witnessed, so powerful that their hearts almost stopped from fear.

A white blinding light emanated from the woman, searing the retinas of the creatures for their lifetimes, a force causing even their powerful muscles to collapse. The remaining leaves on the trees around them disintegrated into ash, a four meter radius of destruction.

An emolga emerged from a hole in his tree, where he had been keeping his berries and nuts for the winter. The bedrock below the soil that was now gone had turned to solid glass, a single gem beneath each of the creatures. Delia had disappeared, and in her place was a symbol engraved in silver onto the glass—two circles, the small one

overlapping the larger one on its inside with a cross in the smaller circle.

The creatures were sleeping peacefully, persian-like on the perfect glass disc, not a muscle moving. The emolga turned back, ignorant of the power just performed. A mile behind, a wisp of the escaped queen's dark brown hair floated, finally finding its way back to the ground, before it too, flashed in blinding white, and disappeared into nothingness.

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We now look into the futureâ€"fifteen years to be exact, of the life and times of a courageous young man.

What a great days work, this young fellow with black hair mused. As he trotted through a dingy alley way, his gait was lithe and his narrow shoulders bobbed with a natural inner confidence.

A velveteen pouch filled to the brim with gold jingled merrily by his side, in contrast to the filthy rags that he wore every day. In his pocket was a particularly shiny silver protector in which he had found in the village marketplace just hours ago.

His head turned backward, an instinctual measure to evade any unwanted pursuers or angry shopkeepers. Where's Gary? He thought. He should have here with a ton of gold by nowâ€| a frown creased his forehead as he walked with renewed vigor to check the other side of the rendezvous point.

"Boo!" A young voice shouted followed by a hand that clamped the boy's mouth, catching the gasp that was on the tip of his tongue. His raised eyebrows turned into a picture of amusement, exasperation clearly visible in his brown eyes.

"Classic Gary," He sighed seeing his friend, a young lad with mahogany colored hair and viridian eyes, and his brother in all but blood ever since he was a baby.

"Ha! You should see the look on your face Ash!" Gary held his sides as he laughed. "It's so priceless!"

Ash rolled his eyes playfully. "Whatever. I betcha I've got more gold than you!"

A grin swept across Gary's boyish face, his eyes glinting in the shallow light of the evening. "Hehâ€|we'll see about that."

"67, 68, 69â€|how many do you have?" Ash asked, his fingers crossed so tightly he had restricted the blood flow.

"69â€|crap we tied!" Gary's face broke into a wide grin as he pulled his hand from behind Ash's ear.

"70! Ha! Looks like I win, sucker!" He smirked in triumph.

Ash grinned. "Not so fast," Gary's humungous smile vanished as Ash whipped out the fine silver protector he had been admiring earlier. He winked, hardily. "Not today, buddy. But good effort though."

Sighing, Gary replied, "Fineâ€|you win Ashy-boy."

"It looks expensive, too expensive for the market there. That's why I didn't sell it for gold. Might sell it when the Royal Train comes tomorrow, since there's usually a fair maiden we can charm with our good looks, can't we?" Ash winked.

Gary's face relit with the initial liveliness as the two boys chatted on about the girls in the orphanage, and particularly, a beautiful young woman whom Gary had started showing an avid interest in.

The two lads gathered the coins back in their pockets, ready to dash back to the orphanage before midnight to give them to Lenora, the orphanage owner, to feed the rest of the children. It was enough to last the 60 children a week at least, on staple meals.

As the boys walked back home together, arms around shoulders, Ash couldn't help but thank Arceus for the thrilling life he had with the greatest of friends beside him.

The next morning, the first rays of light shone through Ash's messy bedroom window. He was brushing his teeth, with a small brush he had found in the waste. He had cleaned it of course.

A cracked mirror lay opposite him in the corner of the room that he and Gary shared. His black hair shone at him, a medium length, swept to his right side. He had tanned skin, and he was beginning to tone, as a result of the many testing manual chores he was set to do in the orphanage, such as gathering firewood from the forest, and chopping them into short more manageable pieces with his axe.

Ash looked closely at his eyes. They wereâ€|changing. He could swear they were lighter than yesterday, and he saw a tint of yellow in his irises.

Strangeâ€|Hm, I'm probably seeing things, Ash told himself. His teeth were gleaming white after a good three minutes of brushing and he turned back to Gary, who had just started awoken, his hair in a complete mess, just like Ash's before he had roughly combed it down with his wet fingers.

"Hurry up, Gar! Today's the big day! The Royals are coming and we've got pockets to empty!"

Gary yawned. "And not our own pockets," He grinned, chucking on his shirt, and brushing his teeth with his toothbrush all at the same time.

Ash peeked through a convenient hole in one of the wooden bedroom walls. "Gar, look! She's changing!" Gary dropped his brush, hastily washing his mouth. He only brushed for a half a minute. Halfway through scrambling to reach where Ash was, he halted.

"Nah, that feels wrongâ€|I'll have to wait until we're married." he shook his head, wondering where Ash had got all his moral values

from.

The young lads, 15 summers old, ran past Lenora and Daisy, grabbing a loaf of bread to share as they headed to their work area. They could hear the band even from the orphanage, which was situated outside the city walls. The Royal Procession was about to make its entrance into South Town, to immediately start the Selection Ritual, an annual event to choose young men and women that would be taken in to be trained as a dragon riders, that was rumored to discipline in every form of mental, physical and spiritual combat.

Well, that's all Gary heard anywayâ€¦

The train was about to enter the city and the two boys just emerged from the forest on their way there when the gates opened, and Her Majesty, Queen Diantha, entered royally, standing on an expensive looking carriage, pulled by two rapidash.

As he ran, Ash could make out the silver tiara that she wore, reflecting the sun's rays in a million directions. He could see in the distance a hand, waving at the eager boisterous crowd.

Behind her, there were twenty royal guards, fully suited in shining armor, riding war zebstrika and rapidash of their own. Their helmets were off and by their sides, and they were obviously at ease, some of them ecstatic about returning to their home city, if only for a few days. Behind them were courtiers and some in chariots. And then there were the line of merchants who were making a whole lot of wealth through the Queen's fame.

Ash and Gary reached the back end of the procession, waiting in line for entrance into the massive city of Southtown. It was a busy day, every citizen roaming the streets to watch the Queen, or to make money of the people watching the Queen. The stone roads were weathered by the constant trampling of feet, and the air was filled with every type of aroma, some pleasant, like the roses and cosmos on the side of the Queen's carriage, but some dreadfully horrid, like the putrid smell of stale alcohol from the old men who had been at the bar the previous night.

Now that he was closer, Ash saw that the Queen was still young, in her early thirties possibly. Her features were striking, hair braid neatly into a star-shape. She carried a regal pose, yet not arrogant or superior, simply just elegant. Her smile lit up the hearts of every citizen of Southtown, they all knew they had a beautiful strong Queen that would sacrifice everything for them, and they were proud of that.

Ash and Gary was the portion of citizens who were taking advantage of Diantha's fame. While the citizens would gaze awestruck at the Queen, the boys would be busy sorting out their unknowing pockets and filling up the four buckets they had brought today, expecting a huge haul.

Ash grinned. He was about to have a lot of fun. He and Gary dropped off the buckets in a small corner of an alleyway, diving into the crowd of onlookers. Gary caught Ash's wink, and felt the inner competition within him again, his concentration now peaking.

His hands slipped deftly into bags and pockets, each movement

resulting in something of value in his pocket, he weaved in and about the crowd, accidentally bumping into people and stealing away before they had an opportunity to find out what they had lost. He played the role of a lost young boy trying to find his mother, and it worked without fail, drawing the sympathy of the people he was robbing from.

It's not like they don't have more, and they aren't starving, Ash reasoned. But inwardly, he wish he didn't have to do what he was doing to live, and that was why he had been treating it all like a game with Gary all this while.

The procession was near the center of the city now, the carriage coming to a halt, and the guards resuming a circular formation around the carriage, protecting Diantha from the love of her people. She touched her hand to her throat, as if flicking a switch and her voice was heard to every person's mind in the city. Her power stunned the people. The voice that Ash heard was not shouting, it was soothing and gentle, loving and kind.

"Greetings my dear people of Southtown, I am so glad to return to your beautiful city, to experience your boisterous nature, to touch these ancient walls. As you all know, I am here for the annual selection, and of course, this will be done as custom by the judgment of Arceus. He lives and breathes, and he is our Ultimate King, much more powerful than I, and there will be a day, my people that he will return and lead this kingdom forever. He has given me three names, and I have no knowledge of these identities, but I shall call them out, and they must make their way here to be recognized as the Chosen. If they do not make their way forward, a search party will be sent, and he or she will be captured, as they owe a duty to the nation as much as I do, and I see it as a blessing."

Her face was composed, her porcelain white skin shining in the sun, lighting her up like an angel. "I will now announce the first name," A hushed silence enveloped the city as the people waited in anticipation.

Ash had filled up his pockets, and emptied them in one of the buckets that he had brought, and he was running back for a second round, a mischievous glint in his eyes. His arms were sore, but his enjoyment in the skill of thieving completely outmatched the pain. He couldn't believe how much wealth the people carried, particularly the courtiers. It was as if they had an organ that produced money, next to their hearts and lungs. He had winked at some of the younger attractive courtiers, most of who had either ignored him or blush furiously.

He had been stealing from them too. He did not discriminate. The Queen took out a scroll from one of her Guard, and unfolded it, the crowd leaning in. She opened her sculpted mouth. "Ashton James Ketchum."

Ash's hand stopped mid steal in an attractive woman's skirt, her purse in his hands. He let it go. No, it was a mistake. He took it back and was about to resume chatting to the woman innocently, when the Queens voice penetrated his thoughts again. "Is Ashton James Ketchum here? Ashton James Ketchum. A search party must be sent then."

Ash stopped. The woman beside him was confused. "Waitâ€¦_you're_ Ashton Ketchum?" she asked with unmasked disbelief.

He turned to the Queen, his hand already placing the woman's purse into his pocket. His brain controlled his slow movements as he made his way to the entrance the guards had made for the Chosen. As his foot stepped onto the laid out turquoise carpet, he could hear every beat in his heart, thumping as if it was a time bomb, ready to explode.

His brain was on autopilot now, a mind of his own, as he heard himself stop in front of a guard. "I am he, Your Majesty." He replied with a gulp.

Diantha, having already unfolded her second letter, turned her head regally towards Ash, her deep blue eyes piercing him, as if analyzing him for worth. "Do not be afraid, Ashton, I am your queen, I do not bite." The probe penetrated his mind, filling the dark-haired boy with calm thoughts of reassurance.

He was slightly dazed, having no clue as to what the Queen had just done to him. He felt a cold iron glove to the small of his back and he was steered to just behind the Queen. Ash's thoughts whizzed, and his first inward comment was of all people, why would the great all-knowing Arceus pick a small thieving orphanage boy like him? It just didn't make any sense.

Ash suddenly froze, the unconscious playing with his hair stopped, as he realized with dread, that he would never be able to see Gary again!

In his mind, he mourned for the impending loss of their friendship, and their inevitable tragic separation from each other. He remembered the good times they had played together, charming beautiful girls, sneaking out past curfew, running from angry merchantsâ€¦

A tear welled in his eye, threatening to break free. _No, I will not cry. Gary was strong. So I will be for him._ Ash searched the crowd for his best friend, his brown and yellowish eyes scanning each person's face. He wanted just one more glance.

While he was stuck in his silent agony, he did not notice the calling of a second name, and a short girl taking her place beside him. She was a sight to beholdâ€¦her lilac hair framing a perfect face, with only a thin layer of makeup to accentuate her key features. She was lean and fit a body that most girls would die for. Her eyes were also lilac, like small gems that graced whoever she was talking to. She wore an expensive sparkling deep lavender and gold dress, revealing just enough, but not too much cleavage and thigh, a feature that hooked many young men.

But Ash was not one for glamour. For him, she would be just an upper class maiden whom he used to charm for money. But while part of his brain was mourning for Gary, the other sensible part told him it'd be wise to make a new friend.

The girl beside him looked like she was about to faint. So he decided to charm her. His hand moved to his left, slightly grazing hers, and after she noticed, he smiled warmly at her. She shyly blushed, but her face was grateful for the kind gesture. Ash was silently

congratulating himself when he felt a sudden connection in his brain. He could see the girls face tense, as if in shock.

Ash quickly thought positive reassuring thoughts and he imagined them flying to the girl by his side. Slowly, he could see the girl calm herself, though still in disbelief. He wasn't sure what to believe either. He was once happily thieving away with his best friend Gary when now he was whisked away to some intensive training camp for _super_heroes.

He wasn't a hero, much less superâ€|and Gary. He hated the thought of leaving him. Where would he find his friends now? There weren't many people his age back at the orphanage, and now that he was gone, Gary would no longer have a wingman to get him together with his crush.

Ah well, at least now he had this pretty girl with him, that was now smiling gently at his direction.

Ash felt a tap at his right shoulder. He slowly turned away from the young maiden, not realizing that the Queen had put her third letter away. He saw the dark hair and the twinkling grey eyes before the crinkled smile he had grown up with. He was wearing the same rags as Ash, failing to subtly hide the big pouches of gold by his side.

"Ash!"

"Gary!"

Their hands and fist clashed in a series of complicated movements as their smiles shone in the already bright and sunny day. It was all going to be alright, Ash thought. He and Gary were gonna do this together.

"Phew I thought I was never gonna-"

"Pssstâ€|" Gary whispered urgently, "the crowd!"

Ash froze, realizing with dread what he had done. He imagined with horror that it must have been the most informal thing anyone had ever done in front of the Queen. The crowd had their mouths wide open in shock, though some of them were chuckling and smiling from the spontaneous display of affection.

Gary was holding in his sides, trying in vain to stop himself from laughing hysterically. Thankfully, the Queen was smiling royally, glad for the young lads. Ash overcame his initial shock and joined Gary in laughing like monkeys. The girl was also smiling at them, though jealousy on her face, as if she had never had a best friend.

As Gary half recovered, he said in a low voice, "Bro, that girl is cute! This is gonna be amazing!"

I know, Ash thought, but not just because of that girl.

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Ash, Gary, and the girl from before sat in a small carriage, a stark contrast between the upbringings of each of them. After the initial reunion of the two boys, Ash turned to the girl and took her hand and said, "Sorry, I haven't caught your name yet, maiden."

She smiled shyly back at the two lads and said, "I'm Anabel. Ash and Gary right?"

Ash, tearing his eyes from her salient features, said sheepishly, "Yep, Ash would be me. Any idea where we are going anyway?"

Gary looked around at the plump turquoise cushions around him and decided he did not like royal living. "I have no clue, but I'm gonna ride a rapidash."

Anabel watched in disbelief as Ash dropped a shoulder to the door, and jumped out of the fast carriage. "Gary!" she exclaimed.

Ash put a hand on her shoulder as she rose, calming her and forcing her back in her seat, "Don't worry, the kid may be crazy, but he knows what he's doing." he closed the carriage door. "See?"

Anabel peeked out the front window, startled by a wide grin on the other side of the pane, so close to her face. Gary was hanging by the tip of his fingers and toes on the front of the carriage, and he kissed the glass where he had seen Anabel's lips. She blushed. Ash slapped his forehead.

Gary colored slightly too, and reprimanded Ash for being too forward. He jumped from his uncomfortable spot onto the back of the horse-like creature pulling the carriage, and sat there, content with no saddle of stirrups, to just ride naturally.

He loved riding, it made him feel powerful. But it was also a good break from the last few hours chatting to Ash, and he couldn't bear the beautiful gaze of Anabel. He needed to think, out here, by himself. And riding seemed the best way to do it.

Gary wondered about his future, about what Arceus had in store for him. About all the beautiful girls there might be where he was going. He was a boy. It was inevitable he would think of such things. A small whisper resounded in his thoughts.

"Gary, my son." The voice was magnificent, though it spoke very softly, almost too soft for him to hear. "What the hell?" Gary thought. A chuckle came by his side and he turned, only to see nothing but the air rushing past him. He must've been hearing things. It's the Queen, he thought, yes, I'll blame it on the Queen. He smiled.

"Halt!" the commanding guard shouted. A barrage of hundreds of rapidash and zebstrika stopped, and Gary was caught out of his revelry, narrowly avoiding steering his rapidash into the next merchant's cart.

Why are we stopping? He thought. They were caught in a dirt road, in

what seemed like one of the many villages that surrounded Southtown. Beggared children lay on the street, pleading for just a few pieces of silver. Gary took out the pouch of gold he had stolen earlier in the day and threw out its contents to the poor children. Surprisingly, they didn't scramble for the gold, in fact, some of them just sat there and smiled amusingly at the young lad.

That was weird, he thought. But what came next was even stranger.

The Queen stepped off her carriage and struck her hand into the air, her eyes glowing lightning blue. She smiled. "Home, sweet home my friends!"

Her smile was infectious and soon Gary was smiling too, though for what he did not know. Ash cried out from inside the carriage, "Whoa! What theâ€¦!"

There, in the small well next to Queen Diantha, a serpent-like creature, a dragonair shot out, its magnificent body trailing through the air, and Gary could swear it turned and winked at him, before slamming into the ground on the other side of the Queen. Gary's mouth was still wide open, threatening to dislocate entirely, as the moving body from the well to the ground froze solid, and became an ornate golden arch above the Queen's head. If he had been watching, the beggars around him were rolling around the floor, laughing like little maniacs.

Anabel shrieked as an intense burn started to mark the golden flank of the arch, spelling out, "Is atre domÃ¬ni rÃ© Arceus, guardione rÃ© Ses avÃ¬e". Gary wondered what it meant, and was fascinated by the elegant sounds of each syllable as he twisted them around his tongue. Somehow, it felt like how he was pronouncing the words were the correct way. He didn't know how, but he knew he could speak the language.

Gary's attention returned as his rapidash moved through the arch way. He noticed the smile of the merchant in front of him before he too was overwhelmed by a loud cheerful noise of people dancing on the street, reuniting with their Queen. As he looked around, his eyes were filled with wonder. He had somehow been transported into a whole different place, the cobblestone floors, wooden ornate houses, the many merchants and markets and glowing street lamps now smiled at him.

The lamps weren't lit from gas; instead, Gary could just see orbs of slightly turquoise flame dance within them, probably celebrating the Queen, since her color was turquoise.

His eyes wandered to a group of young children, playing with figurines of dragon pokemon and royal knights. There was one toy knight in particular who magically stood up, raised an eyebrow quizzically, and shouted loudly, "You dare touch me! I, am Lance, Warrior of the Most High!".

This was the cue for the children to go nag their mothers to buy them the toy. The mothers themselves though, were almost subconsciously waving their hands around, making sure their kids stayed near them. Gary almost fell off his rapidash when he saw a small child run away from his mother and hit what seemed like an invisible cushioned wall,

and the child then fell on his bottom, slightly dazed. Shopkeepers had protective barriers around their most prized possessions, which glimmered red when a customer accidentally stepped too close.

As Gary looked around he gasped again, as the sight in front of him was amazing. He saw, in the middle of this magical city, a tall castle, made of polished granite, turrets and everything, with defensive holes for archers, points to pour boiling oil and traps all in built in the design. But what blew Gary away was not that. In fact he barely noticed those features.

The castle was floating. In midair. He could see underneath was a golden force lifting the castle up, like a moat, except ten times cooler. As the Queen's train approached the castle, the golden shimmer frizzled and a wind pushed some of its magic towards Diantha, as if it were attracted to her power.

The golden mist then turned into clear gold glass, and those shards of glass pieced together, white light forming at every join to seal the pieces together. It was a bridge. The Queen, a massive smile on her face, took a step forward, and her heel connected with the bridge, a small ripple of concentric circles spread from her touch.

Ash shouted from behind, "You gotta be kidding me, all of us, on a piece of glass?"

Gary grinned, "Heh, yep!"

He turned back to the amazing sight in front of him, his face more excited than when he had first successfully pickpocketed a royal merchant at the age of 5.

As they entered the dark oak doors of the castle, Gary spotted some cloaked men on the turrets with their hands held up to the sky. Glowing purple emanated from their palms, shooting up into the air like fireworks and exploding, each one a resounding BOOM, disappearing into nothing.

Then suddenly, where each of them had exploded, the mist in the air condensed into sparkly letters: "ARCEUS THY QUEEN!" Gary was going to need to find the clinic soon, or his jaw would come off entirely.

They were finally in the middle of the giant castle, in a courtyard space roughly the size of a football field. The big stone tiles lay under their feet, shivering from the power under the castle. The Queen lifted herself up, standing on an invisible pedestal 5 feet up in the air, and addressed her train.

"Welcome home, my friends. I have always loved the vibrancy of this city." Her face lit up everyone else's. "Of course, now that we are back, we do need to stay productive, do not slumber, anyone of you. I do sense some great evil lurking. Where? I do not know. But, together, with Arceus' sovereignty, we will be victorious." A cheer. She waited patiently. "Lastly, I'd like to give a very warm welcome to our newcomers from Southtown."

Another resounding cheer with a sprinkle of whooping. "Please make yourselves at home, but first of all, please just make your way to

the crown room, I've got some things to tell you."

Gary looked at Ash, the smile on his face clearly showing his excitement at meeting the person who could levitate in the air for a whole minute. The carriage holding Ash and Anabel patiently waited for the crowd to part, while Gary haphazardly jumped his rapidash over unwary merchants. He shot back one more mischievous smile before disappearing into the castle.

By the time all the newcomers had got to the foyer of the throne room, Gary was sitting in the corner of the area, dreamingly throwing a rock he had found at a wall. Ash was about to scare him when Anabel said, "Hey Gary, bit bored there?"

Said boy in question turned around to catch Ash's discontented look at Anabel. He grinned. "Nah, I just love throwing rocks at walls. It's a hobby of mine."

The group of newcomers that were now gathered there halted their conversations as the Queen opened the door. "Hello dears, come in, there's a bit of room here." Ash looked around at the group of awed faces, too stunned by the Queen to move.

This is ridiculous, he thought. "What are you guys waiting for? Well, looks like I'm first then." He smiled at Diantha, and stepped in, oblivious to the face palm from Gary and nervous chuckle from Anabel. The group of adolescents was still awestruck, this time by the lad's blatant show of discourtesy.

"Fine, I'm second, then." Gary smiled, reveling in the surprise that seeped from the other newcomers. He knew the Queen was fine about it. Her gentle deep blue eyes said it all. A round of complicated handshakes followed, concluding in a fist pump explosion. Anabel chuckled, and filed in with the others.

When they were all cozy and settled on the floor, Diantha closed the door behind them, and sat on her throne, shepherding all her servants and advisors away from the room. "This will be a private conversation Wikstrom, yes you too, Siebold, not even you, Malva." She gave each one of her royal knights a world class stern look as they left the room as well.

"Alright, my dears. This here, she gestured around the room, is your family. You are all the Chosen, for this cycle anyway. You will not know this, but the Chosen ones are the most elite group of men and women in the Kingdom at all the fields: education, combat, magic, medicine, and etcetera. My blades, the closest guards to me, have all come from the Chosen, bar a few. Royal magicians, healers, they have all studied as a Chosen. Arceus has chosen you for a grand purpose, younglings, and whatever it is, remember this: to those who have been given much, much will be expected." She paused for effect. "Now, let me tell you about your mentors. The previous cycle of the Chosen, who are now three years into training, will receive a sign from Arceus that will tell them who they will take care of. Each of the signs they receive will be different, but they will know when it happens." Amusement showed on her face as she surveyed the confused faces of the newcomers. "It will happen in the next week, it always has."

"One more thing. Each of the Chosen has one specialty, and only one.

You will be examined and tested over this next weekâ€"don't worry! It will just be observations, no actual exams."

Gary's face flooded with relief. "And by the end of this week, a branding will happen on the back of your hand, like mine" She lifted up her left hand, and the newcomers stared in awe at the glowing purple mark she wore. She pulled her arm back as quick as she had produced it. "That branding will tell you which knight to go to, and you will find out what to do from there. That is all I will inject into your surprised brains today, my dears. Your mentors, when you get them, will tell you much more."

With a wave of her hand, her advisors and servants walked back into her room, and she started discussing foreign affairs as if the group of newcomers were never there.

"I thinkâ€| that was a good luck and bye." Ash whispered. Gary dragged him out of the room, muffling his squeals of protest, evidently trying to kill any risk of Ash making a fool out of himself in front of those important people.

"It's really late man. We need to go to sleepâ€|" Gary's eyes drooped.

Ash slapped Gary's back. "Are serious?! How can you sleep at a time like this! We're going to be dragon riders!"

"You're right," Gary's eyes shined. "It's only 8:30. That was my bedtime when I was 6!"

Ash tried to change the subject. "So what did you think of the Queen?"

"Yeah she was pretty awesome. But it's crazy ay? We're gonna be doing something other than stealingâ€| Hmmmâ€| Or maybe we will be picked to get into the stealing guild or something."

A haunting realization gripped Ash. He felt his hand claw at Gary's shoulder as he staggered. "Uh, Gar? We're gonna be learning stuff aren't we?"

"Yeah! It's gonna be awes-"

Gary paused. "Crapâ€|"

"Yeahâ€|we're going to school." Ash tried to hold back tears as he forced those words out, chokingly. An impressive feat.

Gary staggered and his hand clawed at Ash's shoulder. And since both of them were leaning on each other, they both fell into a heap on the ground.

"Ash-boy?" Gary's eyes were blank.

Ash gulped.

"I think I've lost the will to liveâ€|"

* * *

><p>Well, that does for the first chapter! This is pretty much a teaser to see if you guys want more. Aside from characters like Dawn and May (they're going to be included anyway) who else would you like to see as part of the harem? Any other couples you like for me to include? And who should pair Gary up with? Tell me! I'm open most ideas, so feel free to voice your opinions.

****Our heroes are going to meet their dragons in the next chapter, so review, follow, and favorite, and I hope you all enjoy my little twist to the usual Pok  mon fanfiction! Thank you for reading! - Rain****

2. Chapter 2

****Due to the positive feedback (I can't thank you all enough for that!) I'm back with another chapter for everyone. As promised in the ending note of the previous chapter, our heroes meet their dragons in this one. Also, thank you so much for the suggestions for the harem and Gary's pairing. If you have any more, feel free to tell me.****

* * *

><p>Among the Clouds_

One boy. One dragon. One kingdom. One destiny.

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_**Chapter Two: **__The Orphan and the hatchling._

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"Wakey, wakey, Ash-boy!" Ash suddenly felt a large soft object flatten his face.

"Five minutes." He swore he had just lain down on the bed.

"No! Now you a lazy ass! You only wake up when we're about to pickpocket people."

Ash stifled a yawn. "Isn't that pretty much every day?"

That brought about a short moment of peace and quiet before Gary thought of an appropriate response. "Shut up,"

"With pleasure."

"Oi!" Another thud in Ash's aching head. "Anabel's changing in the

room next door!" Gary whispered in his ear before backing away knowingly. Ash instantly sat straight up, spine rigid.

"Ha! Gotcha!" An extended mournful moan came from Ash's mouth upon hearing this.

"Awwâ€|you have _got_ to be kidding me!"

"I am. She's not changing next door." Gary shot a wink at Ash's direction. "But if we're quick enough, we'll probably get to pick choice seats at breakfast next to whoever we like."

Ash had just finished combing his hair with a new comb he had found in the room that they had received last night. It still looked like a jungle. But at least it wasn't the Amazon.

Gary smiled. "I'll see you down at the hall, my stomach needs pleasing!"

And off he went.

Ash got up, cracking a few major joints in the process. _That's really weird,_ he thought. _Why do I feel like I've just ran around the whole of Southtown while I was sleeping? Hm._

Without another thought, he started brushing his teeth, then halted and smiled. _Heh, new toothpaste, new brushes, running water, new whatever the hell this thing is. Life is great. _

He started brushing again, reveling in each gentle stroke. _I could do this all day!_ He mused. His stomach growled furiously. On second thought, maybe notâ€|

Spitting out the foam, he started changing into a new set of clothes that he was given, while doing his hair simultaneously. He soon finished grooming and hastily rushed out of the door. He stopped. He had left something. He came back through the door and reached for a dull black metal necklace that he had hung around the doorknob. He had hung it there yesterday as a bit of childish thinking, that it would give him luck against any evil that may reside outside his room. He thought that since it was his first night here, he would need to sort of _christen _the place. He had had the necklace for as long as he could remember, Lenora, the orphanage mother had told him it had arrived in his cradle, and that the note said it was to protect.

Ever since he had been told that, he had taken it with him wherever he went, clinging to it as if it were a concrete pillar foundation, standing tall and permanent as a strong comfort.

Ash glanced quickly at the simple design of the metal pendant, then light footedly stepped past the door, closing it behind him. He had to get to breakfast fast; his stomach was killing him. His fingers felt the fish shape of the metal as he subconsciously put the necklace on, before entering the great hall of the castle, blown away again by the sheer grandiosity and boisterousness of the group of castle dwellers who had come for an early breakfast. There was food piled on every table, the simple baked bread, butter and jam, along with warm pancakes covered in molasses, ham, and sausage.

It took Ash all of three minutes to find the table where Gary and Anabel were sitting, before he purposefully strode his way there.

"Hey guys, how's it going?" Ash immediately plunged into the pancake on the serving platter directly in front of him, trying in vain to keep as much syrup on it as possible.

"Ash!" Anabel greeted with a serene smile and slight blush. "G-good morning!"

"Hey, Ash, I've met some new people! Come, I'll introduce." Gary turned his head back to the group of teens who were chatting amiably. "Guys, meet my brother Ash. We've known each other in the womb. Actually probably not. Actually definitely not. That would be disgusting." Gary's face scrunched into a paper ball shape. "Anyway, he's a somewhat cool guy and we've been pick pocketing people for a living, you know for food and such. That's what we do." Gary smiled at the group, who were now listening interestedly.

"Ash, this is Natural, he's from Verona." Natural shook Ash's outstretched hand, with a small smile. He was of medium build with blue-grey eyes, and had long tea-green hair, his most notable feature. His shake was strong and firm—Ash instantly liked him.

"I'm Lance. I'm from the previous cycle. I'm also your brother's mentor." Ash's eyes drifted left to a tall red-haired man. Lance emanated of strength, his muscles even in his neck standing out. His image was of power, and Ash remembered the figurine that the kids on the street drooled at.

This must be him. As Ash's keen gaze met the taller man's eyes, he could see behind the power, that there was also a gentleness, and kindness. He accepted Lance's hand, expecting a crushing handshake, but though firm, he was controlled, their callouses created a small friction.

Ash smiled, "Nice to meet you guys, how did you know you were Gar's mentor?"

"I've seen him in my dreams. Arceus has revealed him to me crystal clear, and says our partnership will save our lives many times."

"That is so unfair, bro. How come you get yours before mine?" Ash pouted, his raven black hair sweeping down, creating quite the comical face. Gary tipped his head back and laughed.

"Hah! You may have stolen more gold than me, but when it comes to mentor-acquiring, you have absolutely no chance!"

Natural and Lance traded looks, amused smiles in their faces.

The boys group ate leisurely, before heading to the war room. There were numerous signs that helped them navigate around the castle, but it still felt like a maze where one kept going in circles no matter how hard they tried. Fortunately, Lance was there to lead the in the right way, and they soon found themselves in the room with the other eleven chosen of the cycle. It was massive!

Approximately 500 x 500 meters, the room looked like it could fit a whole army. As Ash looked around, he saw straw dummies for practice, as well as an obstacles area with trees and boxes and card shaped to look like people. He also noticed the many slice marks across all the objects.

The room was open-roofed, the natural morning sun glinting off a fighter's sword as he danced against an imaginary enemy, practicing a routine endlessly. This was surely a room of hard work and dedication. Lance told Gary that he would be back after training, he then left promptly.

After a minute or two of waiting, a tall athletic man commanded the group's attention. He was elderly man of sixty and his silver hair thinning slightly, but his eyes betrayed the youthful and powerful energy that invigorated him.

"Greetings Cycle 08, I am the swords master here at the Queen's Castle. I am Sir Rowan. You may call me Sir. You were chosen not by what you have done, but by what Arceus has in store for you. Do not feel more superior because you were chosen. Why, you have not even done any mighty deeds yet! But the honor and glory that you seek comes with a price: that of dedication and sacrifice. While in my lessons, you will dedicate your full attention to me, and every inch of your body needs to be willing to learn. You will sacrifice your comfort and time. You do that, and I guarantee that you'll go far. Hear me?"

"Sir yes sir!" After a few seconds, Ash looked around at the rest of the group, who remained quiet. "Come on guys, surely I'm not the only one to see our Kingdom soldiers speak to their sergeants!"

Sir Rowan held an amused smile. "You heard the boy."

"Yes, Sir!" The group of teens shouted.

Rowan smiled again. What a lively bunch they were. "Much better. Now everyone go and pick a one handed sword. I will teach you lot simple techniques for today."

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Cycle 08 struggled to keep up with Sir Rowan's footsteps as the tall man strode gallantly into a room adjoining the war room. As Ash walked in, he could not stop an involuntary gasp escape from his lips. The others had similar expressions on their faces.

"Ok. Now _this _is ridiculously cool."

Gary slid his finger down a steel blade that hung from the wall. It was fine steel; magical engagements could be seen as a galvanized layer if one held it against the light. Behind it, was its sheath, a standard brown leather sheath, made with patience and of course care. In line with it, to the left, were seemingly infinite copies of the sword and sheath that extended all the way to the far wall. Below the

sword, there was a row of another type of sword, all the way to the far wall.

And it continued.

To the left, opposite the wall, was a shelf, containing three rows of swords, organized neatly into different types, with sheaths behind, a cushion for the blades. Gary walked along the side of the room, shelves containing every kind of weapon passing his eyes. He was thankful the room wasn't open roofed, or the shine from the weapons would've blinded him. He had no idea what most of the weapons were called. But damn, did he want them. As if they called to him, each singing its own seductive song, luring him to touch them, to wield them, to swing them.

"Is there anything that they don't have?" Ash asked, admiring an elegantly curved dagger.

"They probably lack my good looks," Gary jived. He could sense the shaking of his brother's head.

A loud voice barked them out of their banter. "Can I have your attention please," It was sir Rowan. "This, as you have probably guessed, is our armory. It is the biggest array of weapons in the kingdom. The Queen's entire army, bar ranked, visits this room before every war," He paused. "I am not going to let you choose a weapon from here just yet. You are not worthy, young ones. You must be tested, first. Everyone pick up a standard long sword from row 1A, thank you. Meet me outside, last one will be punished."

Ash and Gary rushed to the wall, nearly tripping over each other several times in the process, their thieving agility helping their cause. Grabbing a sword, Ash quickly slid it in its sheath and turned right, catching one of the other students already bolting out. Nobody liked the idea of punishment.

As he neared the door at full sprint, Ash was pushed forcefully from the side, causing him to stumble. It was only reasonable, so many people to the door at once. But the scoundrel who had pushed him faced him aggressively with a snarl before leaving, his short purple hair framing his face.

What a weirdo, Ash thought with a scowl.

He looked again to see a large helping hand. It belonged to a chubby boy, about his age, with auburn hair, faded blue eyes, and a tanned complexion. "I know, the purple haired kid is a bit of a bastard, ain't he!" He grinned at Ash. "Come on, let's not be last!" Ash grinned back and took his hand, sprinting with the boy back to Sir Rowan.

Back with the group, Ash noticed that they were already separated in two groups.

"Right, boy, you are on this side." Sir Rowan motioned Ash to the left. He raised an eyebrow at the boy. "Sword out of sheath I seeâ€|to the right."

Ash realized that every person on his side had their swords in their sheaths while every person on the other side didn't.

"First lesson: never run with a bare sword around your comrades, unless you have a particular violent tendencyâ€|"

He eyed all the swords that were out of their sheaths.

"Group A, those who were intelligent, please come with me. Group B, simpletons, you will be training here."

Surprisingly, Ash walked with the so-called 'sophisticated' group out to another area of the room.

"Right, first we learn to hold the sword and the en garde position."

It went on forever. Holding a sword seemed natural to Ash, and he copied every move of Sir Rowan with ease, as if his hand had already done it long ago. But seriously, the lesson was getting boring.

When they finally got to fight, Ash was paired up with the purple haired boy that had pushed him over before. His face twisted into a crooked smile.

"What've we got here?" The boy sneered.

Ash frowned. "The names Ash, nice to meet you." he remarked with false politeness as he fluently dropped to en garde.

The boy simply sneered again.

"Oi, Paul, after you kill that scrawny kid, we'll spar," said a very tall brown haired boy.

The boy, Paul, shouted back, one hand cupping his mouth and his sword pointing slightly down, "It'll be only a few seconds, just-"

Ash took the chance. He lunged forward, right foot slamming to the ground as he shifted his weight, his sword clanging loudly against his. Paul's sword bounced left, leaving an opening. Ash's eyes narrowed as he swung with all his might from the right before stopping with ease, blade slightly drawing blood on the boy's cheek.

"At least you were true to your word," Ash said with the same crooked smile as before.

Paul seemed like he just realized what had happened, "Wh-what the hellâ€|? I wasn't ready!"

Before Ash could reply, Sir Rowan's voice came from the pair's right. "War isn't fair. Fighting isn't fair. Well done, Ash was it? As for you, Paul, you'll have to train more to become a swordsman."

Despite a sword still held to his throat, Paul's face contorted with fury. Ash couldn't help but feeling a bit superior.

"Maybe swords just aren't your thing? There are tons of other weapons in there." He said smiling genuinely.

Sneering once more, Paul spat at him and stormed furiously away.

"Ah well, I tried. And that was gross!" Ash wiped the spittle from his nose with his sleeve.

"Boy, come and spar with me. You have talent. Don't waste it."

Ash turned to Sir Rowan. He looked him up and down as if analyzing him.

Damn, this was not gonna be an easy fight, he thought. Somehow, he could assess an opponent when he saw one. Strong upper strength, strong leg bounce, high intelligence—ah! High center of gravity—that was his weak point.

But Sir Rowan was looking at him the same way too. He smiled wickedly. "En garde!" He drew a dazzling long sword, runic weavings embroidered over its whole length.

They started pacing around in a circle, their eyes locked together, searching for a hint of what their next move would be. Ash lunged first. With speed he sliced out with his sword, changing grip in the last moment causing the sword to change trajectory. But it was no use, Rowan parried. Ash felt the force push his sword out and he twisted to retain balance. He could feel the counter, and he brought his sword back in a reverse upside down block stance, which diverted Sir Rowan's thrust. He looked impressed. But they both knew those were the testing shots.

They had both gained information about their enemy. Ash kept back after blocking and smiled. He danced towards Rowan in a flurry of calculated strokes, top right, bottom left, switch, mid left, stab, uppercut—it kept going, but Sir Rowan seemed to block each with complete ease. However, Ash was backing him to a wall. Rowan did notice his tactic, but he was not yet close to the wall so he did not expect the young lad closing in on him at this stage. Ash with a quick twirl of the wrist batted the older man sword up slightly, before twisting his body under Rowan's raised arm.

Running towards the wall, he saw his master's eyes widen slightly, the grip on his hilt preparing for a backwards strike. Once there, Ash ran up and jumped off the wall, his foot aiming a kick towards Rowan's chest. But again, it did not work.

Rowan, determination on his face, twisted his body, twirling his sword in a 180 degree arc, before twisting the hilt slightly as it collided with Ash's legs. The boy's eyes widened. He fell unceremoniously on his rump. Rowan wasted no time and rested his sword quickly on Ash's neck.

The crowd that had formed around the cheered loudly. Ash could hear Gary shouting, "Nice work Ashy-boy!"

Ash diverted his attention back to the man who had his sword at his throat.

"You fought well. Aiming to topple my balance I see. Good strategy, but you should've known a great sword master like me would have a million tricks up his sleeve to counteract his one weakness!" His expression mocked Ash and who simply laughed.

"Give me a break; I only just started holding one today!" The sword lifted from his neck and he stood, exhausted.

"You also exert unnecessary strength with your blows" And then he laughed. "However, you did well, boy. Reminds me of myself at that age."

Rowan turned to rest of group. "What are the rest of you gawking at? I'm expecting you to be twice as good as him."

As Ash got up off the ground, the brown haired boy, Paul's friend said, "That was amazing!" as he patted Ash on the back. Ash grinned. He loved sword fighting, and it was quickly becoming a guilty pleasure.

It rung loudly, like a normal school bell, except ten times worse. Cycle 08 were just about to finish their practice lesson, and Rowan, had told him he could instruct the others on stance, positioning and parry. Some people held their ears tightly, while others gripped their swords with more strength. Sir Rowan's smile turned to a grim line.

He grunted, "Emergency assembly. Damn they haven't even told you yet and we have to go. Everyone, make your way calmly to the dining hall!"

They went, ears still ringing, down the hallway, following a stream of others that went in the same direction. Ash noticed a person cloaked in grey, their servant's hood up, sneaking slowly in the opposite direction.

"Gar," he hit brother lightly on the arm for his attention, "Those guys they're up to something"

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A smile appeared on her rosy lips as she watched the various reactions of the castle inhabitants as the merchant's last moments on earth started to trickle away. Her hood shadowed her features and revealed only her parted lips as the man turned to her, cowering in fear at the mere sight of the second most feared person but he held fire burning in his dull grey eyes.

"I warned you, didn't I?" The thief pulled out a silver blade and ran her forefinger along the sharpened side, trying to scare him even farther. The scholar pleaded with her and bent down on his knees, even though he had no intentions of changing his selfish ways.

"Please have mercy upon of me!"

She chuckled, the sweet sound taunting at the poor man's ears and dangled the dagger before his widened eyes. "Please, I never show any one mercy and I won't start now. Besides you should have thought of that when you told me no."

The scholar broke down in quiet sobs and the thief almost started to feel sorry for the man. Almost. The thief turned her back to him and tried to blink away the tears that threatened to fall. She took a deep breath, the dagger falling on the earthy ground beside her with a faint thud. The man's whimpers quickly ceased, the sound seemingly startled him but you could just smell the hope pouring out of him. A shudder went throughout her whole body as she made a silent sound of disgust at herself.

A sound escaped the man's trembling lips and the hope was quickly wiped away with a new sense of fear. "Please, I beg of you. You don't have to do this."

The thief reached into her cloak the feel of the fragile flower giving some comfort. One strike. That's all it took. With just one flick of her wrist and he would be dead in mere seconds. She took out the delicate white rose, inhaling its sweet scent.

The man completely froze, all his regrets falling on top of him all at once. He spoke through a lump in his throat; his voice barely rose above a whisper. "Please."

She tsked." Time's up."

He cried into the sky even though he had nothing to cry over. Mistakes were made and sooner or later he had to pay for them. The man let out a breathy gasp as he tried to process what happened in a millisecond. His hands flew to his chest where the silver dagger was firmly implanted in his chest. With shaking hands, he made failed attempts to take out the knife but he fell onto his back, his eyes gazing somewhere far away.

The thief turned her back to the dead man, holding the bags full of the treasure she and her crew had stolen from the castle, and melted into the shadows that hunched over the ground into the forest. All that was left behind that night was the white rose that lay by the decaying body as a crimson color stained it's petals by the familiar substance.

It wasn't wise to anger the Master Thief.

Chaos found the castle way in mere minutes. News that the Master Thief attacked spread like wild fire. People crowded around the new body found a few miles away from town. Outrageous shouts busted into the quiet air causing the nearby birds to jet out of the trees. The thief darted past the trees, like it was an everyday thing, which it was. She fled deeper until she couldn't hear weeping and screaming. Silence soon found the thief and she enjoyed those few moments she had. She stretched earning a huge satisfied crack from her back and let a huge sigh escape from her lips.

She froze feeling the eyes of several knights lay upon her from various directions. Had she been found out? She hadn't worn her mask; all she had bothered to put on was a black dress, a cloak, and rundown running boots. The thief causally bent down pretending to inspect her boot and slipped a hand in, her fingers brushing along the dagger she had hidden there. She stood straight up, feeling a little comforted that she had a weapon at hand, and walked slowly trying not to let her followers know that she knew about them.

Blood roared in her ears as a breeze blew past her, sending her crimson hair in a huge mass around her face. Her hands shot up to her face and she pushed her hair out of the way as it fell into effortless around her hips, her face was covered in a blank stare. Nevertheless, she stealthily continued with her mission of infiltrating the palace library for the real heist.

She slid the window open and winced as a creaking sound echoed through the room. Pushing her head through the opening, she glanced around the study. It was empty. She let out a soundless sigh as the information registered in her mind. Her luck was looking up.

Gliding one foot through, she waited until her boot clad foot connected to the ground before slinking the rest of her body in. For once, she thanked her parents for making her learn things she once thought were pointless. Her eyes darted around the room before settling on the painting she had come for. It was quite ugly in her opinion, but it would sell at a pricey cost.

Pressing the heel of her foot to the ground, she rolled them to keep her footsteps silent. Finally, she stood in front of the object of desire. One hand reached down blindly to the knife sheathed on her thigh, while the other reached up to grab the painting. Turning, she placed it face down on the desk. The knife grazed across the back as she pressed it as close to the frame as possible. Quickly but efficiently, she sliced down, freeing the painting from its edging. Faint footsteps sounded from behind and her eardrums strained to hear any farther moments from the anonymous source.

"Damn bastard, just show yourself!" The thief snarled into the sky.

"As you wish," A male voice appeared by her ear and it sent shivers all the way down her spine as the owner of voice appeared before the girl.

The thief crouched down in a defensive position and snarled at him. She narrowed her eyes at the knight. In one quick moment, she reached into her boot and threw the dagger attempting pierced her enemy's heart. As luck would have it, he moved just in time to avoid the fatal blow, but suffered an injury to his shoulder.

A growl escaped from her parted lips as the knight gipped his shoulder in pain, backing away as the thief spoke and pulled out a dagger once more.

"They're will be plenty more of that. You're move little boy."

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"Ash, are you sure he went this way?" Gary panted heavily as he followed his brother around the maze-like palace. The lad had insisted on pursuing Lance to see a 'real' Dragon Rider in action.

"Of course I am! Can't pass up an opportunity such as this one!" Ash grinned as the two came upon the library and walked in slowly.

The only source of light was the candles by the altar and one in the back study. Noticing this, the boys immediately head into its direction to find Lance.

"I would love to play more, but sadly, I must be leaving," The thief said with a slight, almost fake sigh.

She heard the injured knight groan in frustration. "It is not that I care. I would have paid you to steal it myself because the thing is horrendous. It's the principle of the matter. I cannot let you just leave the palace without repercussions."

"Kill me then," she said as she faced him once more. Spreading her arms away from her body, she gave the illusion of complete surrender. He should know better though. Thieves would never surrender.

He stared at the intruder. Mixed emotions flew through his body. Either she was a wonderful actress or she was giving in. Taking a step forward, he brightened the light as he tried to get a glimpse of her face. The only thing he was able to see though was her plump red lips.

"Youâ€| you're not like the other thieves, are you?" he asked in wonder.

"Of course not," she said and snapped her mouth closed in frustration. Though not visible, her eyes sparkled dangerously. They were daring the knight to make a move. She wanted him to do something drastic. The question was what she had planned. Did she want him to let his guard down so she could escape with her treasure? Or did she plan on killing him?

"This is ridiculous," she told him with a huff. "Either kill me or let me flee. I feel quite foolish standing here like this."

He shook her head at him. "Sorry, my lady, but I cannot let you leave. I have some questions for you."

"I will just refuse to answer them," she told him as the clock struck the next hour.

Her eyes glanced towards the clock then took on a panicked look. "Sorry about your window."

"What do you mean?" he asked but got no answer in return as she shouted, "Agni, Rudra!"

The window door flew open and two large creatures fell onto his carpet. Taking a step closer, the knight made out what looked like wings and a snout and scales. One of the creatures was blue, the other green. However, they both shared features of red in their wings. Dragons; the thief had a dragons? The knight jumped back away from the dragons and looked at her in shock.

"Like I said before, I am quite sorry, sir, but my boys and I must be going," the thief said and walked towards the window. In shock, he watched as she launched herself out of the opening. Letting out a

shout, he leapt towards her, but he missed. He scrambled to the window expecting to see her falling to her death, but what he saw was her clutching the back of one her dragons.

He let out a sigh of relief. Her had saved her life. The woman was mad, but strangely compelling. He did not know her name or her looks, but he knew one thing; he was going to find the woman.

"Lance!" The knight heard his name being called from the door. Within seconds, he saw Ash and Gary running towards him.

"W-what happened?" Gary took a step back as he noticed Lance's bloodied shoulder.

"She got away," Lance said quietly still staring the out the window. "That thiefâ€¦"

Ash looked around the study curiously, his eyes landing on the empty portrait frame on the floor. He pointed to it. "Is this what she stole?" Lance nodded, and Ash shook his head. "Why steal a painting? That makes no sense."

Lance let out a small laugh. "There's more to it than you think." He walked slowly towards the door. Giving the window one last look, he turned his back to the boys. "I'm heading to the infirmary to dress this wound. The two of you should head back to the dining hall before Rowan notices that you're missing and chews you out."

And with that, he left. Gary too was about to leave until Ash pulled him back.

"You heard him. Rowan will chew us out if we don't hurry back." Gary said pulling himself from Ash's grip. "Let's go."

Ash shook his head 'no'. "And miss the opportunity to find what that thief was really after? Yeah, right!" He dropped to his knees and began searching around the floor. "If I've learnt anything from stories that Lenora used to tell us as kids, there's always a trap door somewhere."

Gary had to laugh at the boy. "You're too curious for own good, you know that?"

"Found it!" He heard Ash yell almost immediately.

He stopped laughing. "Whatâ€¦?"

Gary walked to the bookcase; some of the older floor boards groaning as he went. When he reached it, he saw Ash grabbing the hilt of the wooden dagger he carried and pulling the wooden floor upward. It made a quiet 'click' and both boys scooted back, suddenly paranoid. A trap door noisily slid open in the carpet, and stone stairs descended into the earth. Gary looked around, almost frightened he'd be in trouble, before curiously departing with his brother.

The lads cautiously began to walk down the stairs. The stone was damp, and their feet began to slide under, forcing them to lean on the wall for support. As they reached the fifth step the trap door shut behind them with a loud bang, and now, the staircase was dark and ominous. Gary raced up the steps, being careful as to not slip

and fall, and banged on the spot where the trap door once let them in. From Lenora's stories, in the world that contained a trap doors, this never would work but he tried hopefully anyway. After minutes of banging his fists with no avail, he quit.

"I guess we should keep going, not like we have much of a choice," He said shrug.

"Or, maybe there's a way out at the bottom." Ash chimed climbing down more of the stairs.

Gary simply sighed, continuing down the stairs with him. The smell of dead insects and musky air filled their nostrils and the stairs became even damper. Even though Gary thought it couldn't be possible, the stairway grew ever the darker, and his already creased forehead began to cramp. He stumbled blindly down the stone steps, and the rubber of his boots rubbed uncomfortably against the heel of feet. Suddenly, one of the laces caught in the crack of a stone, and his ankle was twisted. Biting his tongue and stumbling down again, Gary noticed a wavering but steady light that Ash was already walking towards.

When he neared the light, and reached the bottom of the stairs, he saw lit torches on the walls of an almost oval shaped room. As the boys entered the room they noticed the room looked like it was built centuries ago, with the decor and the way the walls were crafted.

Lining the wall other than the various torches in their sockets, were swords of all colors, shades, and even lengths. Their hilts ranged from dark silver, to almost transparent silver, but they all resembled knotted tree roots. At the top of the hilt, the knotted pattern formed either a circle or oval shape, where a gem the same color as the blade resided.

Towards the back of the room, crafted into the wall was a crackling golden fire, the light from which pulsed around the walls, creating dancing shadows. In the center of the room was a stone table, around the height of the each lad's abdomen, and the length of two an elbow to wrists. The top of the stone slab, was a depression, and inside the depression looked to be lined with linen and hay, and both boys could just glimpse what looked like an orange orb resting inside the indent.

Ash cautiously and silently tiptoed towards it, curious about what rested inside. When he was a close to the table as he dared get, he realized what rested appeared to look like a yellow one and a half foot long oval shaped stone. It had white vain looking lines sprawling across it, they looked rough and jagged but for some reason, seemed like they wouldn't hurt if you touched them. Ash reached out his right hand and touched the stone, his fingertips brushed the jagged line, and the stone was cold from years of being in a cold, damp, and musky room. As soon as he realized it was safe to be handled with, he carefully brought up his fist, and knocked on it, with a jolt of surprise, he realized it sounded hollow.

"It's a stone, it can't be hollowâ€|right?" Gary questioned knocking on the stone for himself. Ash shrugged.

The dark-haired boy quickly stepped back, still admiring the

beautiful stone on the table. Then, without warning, the stone began to shake rapidly in its nest, it made a strange sound, one of whistling glass. This for some unknown reason startled the lads. Had they made this happen? No, how could they? Then, the rocking slowed, before the stone exploded and the shards, flew towards them. The boys closed their eyes, not wanting a shard of stone to hit them in the eye, and raised their forearms to protect their faces.

Before they could open them they heard a high pitched, squeaky hiccup. When the lads were finally sure there were no more shards, they opened their eyes. In front of them appeared to be a small lizard looking creature. Until they noticed the fire on its tail. The boys gasped.

The small creature hiccupped again, and opens its maw. It was about the size of a new born baby, only able to be held in his forearms. It had tiny stumps for claws. It had tiny, almost invisible, holes for its nose, and deep cerulean colored eyes.

Since the boys were silent, and its eyes were closed, the dragon still had not noticed them. It was squawking in its wallow, and trying to clean itself of the birth gloop. Ash was shocked that this little creature had come from what had seemed to be a hollow stone. Any normal person would have been terrified, but this lad was in awe. A grin was slapped on his face as he silently observed the tiny creature.

"Look at you!" He finally exclaimed when the hatchling had cleanly licked off the after birth.

The dragon looked at him curiously and squeaked, with its maw opened widely.

Ash took a closer look, and the creature sat down on his bum and let out a fiery hiccup. He then cautiously reached his arm to touch it. He was careful to not let it bite her fingers, even though it made no move to. Finally, when the tips of his fingers brushed the dragon's scales atop its bald head, he felt as if a jolt of lightning shot up his arm, then rushed through his body. The sensation he felt can only be explained as a river of ice water, snapping.

"I guess it's only right to name you," He said.

Ash leaned up his arms slowly, before reaching for the hatchling. He searched for signs of it being a male or a female, but could find none between the continuous protesting growls.

"Leox?" He asked the dragon, trying a male name, though he knew the creature couldn't respond.

The dragon croaked with pleasure at the male name, and Ash assumed that it was a male. He stroked the dragon's head, and it leaned into his strokes. For an odd reason, he looked down at his right hand and noticed he had a silver oval shape embedded in her palm. Ash moved his wrist and was amused to see it shimmer in the light.

"What the hell?"

"Uh, Ash, something's happening to this stone too."

Ash followed Gary's gaze to another egg. Both lads turned their attention back to the egg and waited for it to hatch.

Its blue head poked out of the shell seconds later. Black made up its eyes that were perfectly round. This dragon was about the same size Leox, maybe a little chubbier, and had several rows of sharp white teeth and a red underbelly stretching from its abdomen to the bottom of its jaw. There were also two horns that resembled a shark fin, each with a light blue stripe in the middle. It was easily the strangest creature Gary had seen.

Instinctually, he reached out with his right hand to touch the dragon's fin. As his skin met the scales of the dragon, icy pain shot through his body winding up his arm and creeping through his veins. Gary tried not to yelp from the force of it, and barely succeeded. Time passed slowly during the time that the pain wound its way through his body and it could have been hours later when it stopped.

Gleaming on the palm of his right hand was a shimmering, diffused white oval. Once the pain subsided, Gary reached out to touch the dragon again. The creature seemed to realize that it was his touch and didn't feel like it was threatened. On the contrary, it seemed to enjoy the boy's touch and came closer to him, cooing happily.

He held the little dragon up, looking for any signs of gender recognition, but found none. He reached out with his mind and felt the dragon's consciousness brush up against his own and wished that he could communicate with it, preferably so he could stop calling the baby dragon an 'it' and hopefully have a gender as well as a name for the little creature. Despite that, Gary had one name in mind.

"Leonidas," Gary said. "From now on, that's going to be your name. I know you'll grow up to be a strong warrior."

"Leonidas" chirped happily at his name. It was simply perfect.

Gary touched the dragon's fin with the tips of his fingers once more, and felt the dragon hum in contentment, much like a purloin or meowth would purr. The dragon was rubbing its head against his hand. Once again he felt the dragon's consciousness rub against his own, but this time he felt a ravenous hunger.

"Hey, Ash," He called out his brother looking away from the newly named Leonidas. "Do have anything to eat on hand?"

Ash dug into his pockets of his uniform. "I think I still have some taffy from-"

Ash's sentence was suddenly cut short. Even down in that small, cramped, musty room he and Gary could clearly hear the trap door suddenly slide open with a thump, and then a moment later a clack of it closing. Then they heard footsteps racing down the stairs towards the room.

"Crap!" Ash whispered. "Someone's coming!"

He suddenly felt something brush his mind with an urgent shudder and heard a whisper, _over hereâ€|_

Leox and Leonidas quickly got up and motioned for the lads to follow with quiet chirps before they scampered behind the stone table where Leox's egg had once sat. The brothers crawled quickly behind the dragons and sat next to them in the shadow of the table. Then, when they saw a shadow appear in the door to the oval room, and shortly after, heard a person entered. Ash could feel Leox wanting to growl so he cupped his hand over his snout and pulled the little dragon closer to his body.

The brothers heard a shocked gasp, before shuffling around stone. Then it was silent. After a few moments, the person spoke in a low, but threatening voice:

"I know you're in here. Come out now, and I promise that your punishment will be quick and painless."

* * *

><p>And that's a wrap! Originally, I had planned to go further with this chapter, but decided against it since I wanted to keep the dragons that the other characters have a secret until next time.

So, who do you think the Master Thief is? Originally, this character was male in both the gaming and manga series. Figured it out, yet?

Until next time, review, favorite, follow, and stay awesome! - Rain

End
file.